

Senators Wrestle with Transparency in Healthcare Debate

Both Republican and Democratic senators are expressing concerns over the lack of open process in the Senate's work on a revised ObamaCare repeal-and-replace bill even as Republican leadership looks to move the bill to a vote as soon as possible.

Many lawmakers have not yet laid eyes on the Senate version of the American Health Care Act, which was passed by the House in May, and have begun to raise concerns about potential issues with the bill.

Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-NY) sent a letter to Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) asking for an all-senators meeting to discuss the legislation on Friday, saying that Republicans and Democrats "need to come together to find solutions to America's challenges."

Democrats are wielding a familiar critique. Republicans continuously slammed Democrats during the passage of the Affordable Care Act, also known as ObamaCare, for not being transparent during the deliberation process.

McConnell defended the Senate's process last week, saying there have been "gazillions of hearings" on healthcare over the years.

However, other Republican lawmakers are raising concerns that secret deliberations and a lack of committee meetings leave Senate Republicans wide open for criticism.

Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski (AK), who sits on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, said she is unhappy with the secrecy surrounding the deliberations. "I think that we do better as a body when we respect the process. And the process allows for committee involvement, debate and discussion," Murkowski told the Alaska Dispatch News. "If I'm not going to see a bill before we have a vote on it, that's just not a good way to handle something that is as significant and important as healthcare," she said.

McConnell has implied he wants to aim for a healthcare vote before the Senate takes its July 4 recess.

The Majority Leader is also pushing to use a Senate rule that would allow the legislation to bypass committees and head straight to the floor.

Other Senate Republicans such as Ron Johnson (WI) and Bob Corker (TN) expressed similar concerns to The Hill.

"I would have liked for this to be a public process. It's not going to happen," Corker told The Hill.

"What I've been primarily asking for is once leadership finally does believe they have enough input ... I want to make sure the American people, I want to make sure the members of Congress have enough time to evaluate it," Johnson said. He added, "I want to have enough time to really take a look at what we're voting on."

While some Republicans are expressing unease about the lack of transparency surrounding the legislation, recent reports suggest Democrats plan to outright disrupt Senate business this week to demand more openness.

CNN reported Saturday that Senate Democrats are considering blocking routine Senate business this week in order to make their objections clear. Meanwhile, Politico reported that Democrats planned to hold the Senate floor until at least midnight on Monday in response to the lack of committee hearings being held by Senate Republicans.

Senate Democrats have signaled that everything possible should be done to block the repeal and replacement of ObamaCare.

Republicans have very little leeway in terms of passing the legislation. Republicans hold a narrow 52-seat majority in the Senate and could lose two votes. Murkowski has expressed doubts about the bill, along with Sens. Rand Paul (R-KY) and Mike Lee (R-UT).